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Visible Today

THE BAY OF PIGS. By *Haynes Johnson* with Manuel Artime, José Pérez San Román, Erneido Oliva and Enrique Ruiz-Williams. (New York W. W. Norton. 1964. 368 pp. $5.95.)

Haynes Johnson's "Story of Brigade 2506," told from the viewpoint of the Cubans who fought at the Bay of Pigs and survived Castro's prisons, quite naturally follows his sources in laying the disaster at the door of their presumed sponsor, the CIA. Beside extensive interviews with the four leaders, he says he consulted many other members of the Brigade and of the Cuban Families Committee, used four works published by the Cuban government, and got "information and other documentary material from sources which cannot be divulged." To the best of this reviewer's knowledge he did not get any material from the CIA or discuss the book with anybody in the Agency.

The passages that reflect badly on CIA range from Artime's resentment at having to take a polygraph test and Oliva's adverse comments on the training program in Guatemala—actually, a Joint Chiefs of Staff assessment team gave the training favorable marks—to charges that the leaders were deceived about getting U.S. support and given faulty intelligence for the operation.

San Román and Oliva say they were told by a mysterious "Frank" that the Brigade would not be the only unit involved in the landing, that their air force would include fighter planes as well as B-26's, and that the Marines, though not going in with them, "would be close to us when we needed them." The Brigade leaders learned that they were to establish and hold a beachhead until the civil government arrived, set itself up, and asked for help from the United States and Latin American countries. "Frank" is said to have told them that there were forces in the Administration trying to block the invasion, and that if they received an order to stop they were to ignore it and go ahead with the plan.

Infiltration teams sent in by the Brigade, it is claimed, felt that CIA didn't trust them because many messages sent from Cuba were never acted upon. The Brigade commanders are reported to have been told that Castro would not be able to react for seventy-two hours (an estimate presumably based on the effect a dawn air raid would have on his forces—but the raid was canceled). They were told that Castro's communications were poor, that there would be few tanks and no

planes in the defending forces, and that in the first two days five thousand Cubans would join the Brigade in a voluntary uprising. Erneido Oliva, who had defected from Castro's army, is quoted earlier as saying: "They asked me if I thought a guerrilla force could overthrow Fidel, and I said no, because I knew the regular army. Fidel had been too long in power and was too strong. I asked what backing we had and I was answered, 'We have all the backing necessary.' I asked what the United States was going to do and they didn't answer. . . ." San Román, it is said, "first began to doubt the intelligence information when his flagship arrived at Playa Girón. Instead of the deserted resort houses the CIA had said he would find, the shore was ablaze with lights." And so on.

The allegation that the Brigade's leaders were told to disobey any orders from Washington to cancel the operation is serious enough to have required refutation, and that has been given under oath by the officer involved. But it would be futile to try to check every statement the Cubans claim was made to them. With respect to those promising U.S. support, explicitly or by implication, the question is what other approach the sponsors could or should have taken. You don't send men into battle with a negative attitude. Nearly everybody, American and Cuban alike, was convinced that victory was assured and that the United States would be solidly behind the invaders. Partly for this reason no disaster plan had been formulated—though precious little about the covert operation was put into writing at all. And to those who take at face value the stories of flaps in the action I would recommend a study of the after-action reports done by participants in any battle: there will be little consistency among them about what happened before and during the fighting. No two human beings see or hear alike, particularly under conditions of stress.

So much in defense of CIA. More generally, *The Bay of Pigs* is well done, and a reasonable book about a disaster. Considering what happened to them, the Cuban leaders show remarkably little bitterness. The book is especially good, and probably quite accurate, about the efforts made to free the prisoners and their eventual release. It is weak and sketchy, for obvious reasons, about the planning and execution of the operation from the U.S. viewpoint. It takes its place on the shelf of literature about a battle that may one day be as well covered as Gettysburg.

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